



Beech Green Primary School

School Meals Debt Policy

December 2020

INTRODUCTION

This policy has been written to help school to adopt a consistent approach to debt. It provides clarity and consistency in managing debt and will also help parents clearly understand what is expected of them.

There have been many discussions around whether a child should be refused a meal in school if they have not paid. However, the school meals service is no different than any other business and the meals must be paid for by someone.

Parents can easily relate to the situation that they cannot take their child to McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying, yet a minority of parents expect free food in school. The Free School Meals system is there for parents who cannot afford school meals, there should be no excuses.

The system that works best is a 'zero tolerance' approach, that will be adopted by Beech Green. It may seem a very hard stance in a school where there is a culture of debt tolerance. Although we understand this will be tough to implement it will become easy to maintain once parents realise schools can only offer free meals to children whose parents qualify for FSM entitlement. Every other meal must be paid for. Our ParentPay system highlights debt immediately so keeping track will be easy.

Since schools will be invoiced for meals taken, it is essential that sufficient funds are credited for these meals into the central account, either online or through the cash and cheque deposit process. If there are insufficient funds then schools will be asked to cover the shortfall from their budget.

ESTABLISHING A DEBT POLICY

To ensure that all parents get the same message in a consistent way, this debt policy will be communicated via:-

- The school website
- Reminders via the school newsletter

DEBT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Key Information

1. All parents are provided with a copy of the debt policy when their child joins the school.
Appendix 1
2. All school lunches must be paid for in advance
3. No child should be sent to school with no money in their account and expect to be given a meal
4. Parents who don't want their child to have a school lunch, should provide a healthy packed lunch or arrange to take them home for lunch

Level 1

Indicator: A child's account goes into debt

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
Check 3 does this parent normally pay on time, is this just a one off?

Action 1: send a 'Gentle debt reminder' Appendix 2

This letter is already set up in ParentPay.

Level 2

Indicator: A child comes to school again without the debt being paid or a packed lunch

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
Check 3 has this parent made contact?

Action 2: Personal contact

Someone will phone the parent to ask them to either bring money or pay online or bring sandwiches to school before lunchtime or arrange to take their child home at lunchtime.

Level 3

Indicator: The parent does not comply with any of these options,

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
Check 3 has this parent made contact?

Action 3: send Strong debt letter Appendix 3

The head teacher will send a final letter.

Level 4

Indicator: The parent consistently does not comply with any of these options,

- Check 1 is this a FSM child, are dates correct?
Check 2 is there a possibility that payments have not been credited?
Check 3 has this parent made contact?

Action 4: bring in outside agencies

LEA to advise, small claims court, social services

APPENDIX 1 of school meals debt policy

School Meals Debt Policy for Parents

As from 20/04/2009 Beech Green Primary School has adopted a strict NO DEBT policy relating to the school meal service.

If debts are incurred, then the school budget has to pay for them. This means that money which should be spent on the children's education is used to pay for debts incurred by parents. Every parent will agree that this is unacceptable and we request that all parents give this policy their full support.

No parent would take their child to McDonalds and expect them to be given food without paying; the same applies at school. If parents believe that their children may qualify for entitlement to Free School Meals please contact the office for more details. This allowance is a statutory right and it is important that you use it if you qualify. We will help you all we can with your application.

Parent/s must pay in advance for the school lunch using any of the methods of payment outlined below:

- Online using ParentPay **THIS IS OUR PREFERRED METHOD**
- Ask in the office about PayPoint payments

Cash or cheque payments in school will not be accepted.

Children will not be provided with a school lunch unless it is paid for, except those that are entitled to free school meals. If a parent genuinely forgets to pay in advance, the school may grant a debt allowance of 1 meal. However, this debt must be paid next day and future meals must be paid in advanced before any meal is provided.

If the debt is not cleared, parents must either provide a packed lunch or take the child home for lunch. In a case when a debt payment is not received nor a packed lunch provided, the head teacher (or designated member of staff) will phone the parent to ask them to come to school with the money or ask them to pay online immediately. Otherwise they must provide sandwiches before lunch time or arrange to take their child home for lunch.

If payment of the debt is not received by the next day, the Headteacher reserves the right to begin legal proceedings against parents to recover the debt. Social services may also be informed that these parents are not carrying out the responsibility of care by not providing food for their children at lunchtime.

We hope that by implementing this debt policy we are able to help parents manage school dinner money better and at the same time ensure that all money that is for children's learning is available.

If you have any concerns please don't hesitate in contacting me.

Yours sincerely

Head Teacher

APPENDIX 2 of school meals debt policy

Beech Green Primary School

Parent or carer of Mark Smith
1 The Court
Green Lane
Newtown
Newshire

01/01/1010

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child Mark Smith Class: 5G

As at 01/01/2010 your account is showing a debt of **£-2.32**

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately. Once the debt is cleared please ensure the account is always in credit.

You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to www.parentpay.com NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD
Your username and password are:

Username: xxxxxx

Password: yyyyyyy

2. Ask at the school office for a letter allowing you to pay cash at a PayPoint station, i.e. the local newsagent.

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account at www.parentpay.com. You can see what meals have been taken and when.

The cost of a school meal is £2.32 per day - £11.60 per week.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher

APPENDIX 3 of school meals debt policy

Beech Green Primary School

Parent or carer of Mark Smith
1 The Court
Green Lane
Newtown
Newshire

01/01/1010

Our records show that you have not paid dinner money for your child Mark Smith Class: 5G despite a previous written reminder and a telephone call

As at 01/01/2010 your account is showing a debt of **£-2.32**

Please arrange for this money to be paid immediately.
You have 2 ways to pay:

1. In the secure online payment system ParentPay, using the login already provided, go to www.parentpay.com NB THIS IS OUR PREFERRED PAYMENT METHOD
Your username and password are:

Username: xxxxxx

Password: yyyyyyy

2. Ask at the school office for a letter allowing you to pay cash at a PayPoint station, i.e. the local newsagent.

No matter how you pay you can check the account balance anytime by logging into your ParentPay account at www.parentpay.com. You can see what meals have been taken and when.

The cost of a school meal is £2.32 per day - £11.60 per week.

Since non-payment for school meals affects the quality of service we offer to the children, we need to ensure that all payments are up-to-date and I am afraid that if the debt is not cleared by the end of this week it will not be possible to provide your child with a school meal. You will need to make your own arrangements for your child's lunch.

The school reserves the right to begin legal proceeding to recover the debt and to inform social services of our concerns that you are not providing a meal for your child at lunch time.

If you have any queries regarding these arrears, please contact the school office immediately.

Yours sincerely

Headteacher